

# TURTLE MOUNTAIN CHIPPEWA



## **Turtle Mountain Mothers Against Drunk Driving Belcourt, North Dakota**

<b>Founded:</b>	1999
<b>Service area:</b>	72,000-acre reservation in north central North Dakota
<b>Population:</b>	approximately 15,000 tribal members reside in the Belcourt area
<b>Source of funding:</b>	not specified
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## **Program Description**

The Turtle Mountain Mothers Against Drunk Driving (TMM) Chapter is located in Belcourt, North Dakota, a rural community located 100 miles from Minot in the northwestern part of the state. The Turtle Mountain MADD Chapter was the first tribal MADD chapter in the United States. The chapter currently has nearly 200 members. TMM serves as a support group for people who have lost relatives from drunk driving. Family members and friends can gather to talk, share, and meet with other victims of drunk driving to help with the pain and grief that comes from sudden, tragic loss.

TMM can also provide support and services for survivors of alcohol-related accidents, many of whom have life-altering injuries. Services include counseling, financial assistance, and referrals to appropriate professionals in the community.

## **From Tragedy to Healing**

Tribal member Sharon Parisien lost her 20-year-old son, Wayne, to a drunk driver in 1997. Parisien's grief compelled her to build a community response to drunk driving and related

victimizing behavior. In 1997, nine deaths occurred at Turtle Mountain due to drunk driving. The fatalities increased to 12 in 1999. Each death has a rippling effect in the community as family members struggle with the aftermath of losing a loved one to a criminal act.

Unfortunately, many of those who lose relatives to drunk driving end up suffering from depression. As tribes are losing more people at a high rate due to alcohol-related accidents, additional people are in need of victim services like those that MADD offers. TMM brings a sense of healing to the victims and their families and has been welcomed into all parts of the community. The chapter assists in holding memorials for lost relatives and has an annual 5-mile walk in their honor. Other activities TMM sponsors include family gatherings, picnics, and support groups.

## **Faith-Based Connections**

Native American ceremonies can strengthen victims' lives and inspire them to work for change. In its meetings, TMM includes discussion about God, faith, and spirituality. TMM incorporates Native American spirituality into its victim services, which include sweat lodge ceremonies.

TMM also works with local churches and ministries to assist victims. Local churches will offer their facilities for services and prayers in the event of an alcohol-related accident fatality. The entire church community works to deal with a parishioner's loss. When somebody in the community loses someone, the members of TMM often gather at a local church to pray and support each other through the loss. Working with the church communities limits the amount of isolation and disconnectedness that victims of crime often feel.

Because Parisien and other TMM leaders have experienced the same kind of loss, they understand the unique issues and trauma that families face after being victimized by a drunk driver. The compassion that families exhibit to one another is a key component of TMM services. TMM works to ensure that a family who has experienced a recent fatality is connected with other families who have been dealing with their loss for many years. These experienced families can share their own stories and offer advice for how to cope with the weeks and months ahead. The families report that just having someone close by who understands the pain is a tremendous help.

## Community Connections

Many victims and survivors of alcohol-related accidents have reported that they find solace and comfort as they become more active in the efforts to prevent future tragedies. Becoming proactive in the TMM educational programs gives many victims a sense of purpose in the midst of their traumatic loss. TMM works to educate the community about the dangers of drinking and driving, and many victims speak out about what has happened to their families.

The community, in turn, benefits from TMM's education and outreach activities. TMM hopes that these outreach activities will change attitudes toward driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs and will prevent future victimization. TMM sends a message to the local community that no loss is acceptable—and that none of the victims of alcohol-related accidents can ever be replaced.

TMM has used local and national media outlets to spread the message about the victimization caused by drunk driving. Parisien has been a guest on "Native American Calling," a national radio program that has aired locally on station KEYA on two different occasions. On one occasion, after Parisien told the story of her son's death, many listeners from around the nation called to share their experiences as well.

The radio program had a tremendous impact on Native American families throughout the nation. Victims who spoke out on the air reported that they felt stronger after sharing their stories. TMM members are willing to share their stories and compassion to help others heal and allow their tears to lend strength to someone else.

## Keys to Success

- ◆ Use the media. Turtle Mountain MADD has worked with national and local radio stations to spread the word about available services.
- ◆ Work with local faith-based communities. Local churches can be instrumental in helping families deal with grief and loss.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for victims to become community activists. By working to solve a difficult problem, families can become reconnected to the community.

## Quotes

*Our programs allow victims to come and deal with loss. There is something about tragedy or loss that brings people together.*

—Sharon Parisien  
Safe Communities Program Director  
Turtle Mountain Mothers Against Drunk Driving

*MADD is here to support injured victims, help the bereaved, and assist with the judicial process.*

—National MADD Web site